



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT
22835 CALLE SAN JUAN DE LOS LAGOS
MORENO VALLEY, CA 92553
(909) 697-5200
www.ca.blm.gov



IN REPLY REFER TO:
8342 NEMP (P)
(CA-680.21)

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review is the Proposed Plan Amendment for the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert Routes of Travel Designation and Environmental Assessment (NEMO Route Designation). The NEMO Route Designation will update the Bureau of Land Management 1980 California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan by incorporating into that plan a network of motorized vehicle access routes in portions of Inyo, Mono and San Bernardino Counties in the northeastern portion of the CDCA. BLM has prepared this Amendment in partial fulfillment of its responsibilities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. This NEMO Proposed Plan Amendment/EA is tiered to the previous NEMO Plan/FEIS (Record of Decision 2002). The NEMO Plan/FEIS designated routes of travel in desert tortoise habitat and established Desert Wildlife Management Areas (DWMA). This Plan Amendment designates routes of travel in the remaining planning area outside of DWMA in some Category III habitat for the desert tortoise. To gain a full management picture in the NEMO planning area, the reader is also referred to the CDCA Plan, as amended and reprinted in 1989. Through this land-use planning process, only route designations of the CDCA Plan are amended. Other aspects, such as the cultural resource, Native American, geology, energy, and mineral resources, and energy production and utility corridors elements remain unchanged except as affected and described in the NEMO Route Designation. This document includes a CDROM that contains an electronic version of the text and maps of route designations for the Proposed Action and other alternatives considered.

Any person who has participated in the plan amendment process and has an interest that is or may be adversely affected by the proposed amendment may protest such approval or amendment. A protest may raise only those issues that were submitted for the record during the planning process. Protests must be filed in writing with the BLM Director in accordance with 43 CFR 1610.5-2 and must contain the following information:

- i. The name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of the person filing the protest;
- ii. A statement of the issue or issues being protested;
- iii. A statement of the part or parts of the plan or amendment being protested;
- iv. A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and
- v. A concise statement explaining why the State Director's decision is believed to be wrong.

All protests must be received by close of business Monday, June 14, 2004. Please provide information on how to be contacted if you would like follow-up to resolve or clarify issues that may affect you. Protest should be sent to the following address:

Regular mail and Overnight mail:

Director (210) U.S. Department of the Interior
Attn: Brenda Williams Director, Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 66538 Protest Coordinator (WO-210)
Washington, D.C. 20035 1620 "L" Street, NW, Rm 1075
Washington, D.C. 20036

Copies of the protests should also be sent to:

Edythe M. Seehafer
Protest Coordinator, NEMO Routes Plan
Barstow Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
2601 Barstow Road
Barstow, CA 92311

Your input has been helpful in developing the Proposed Plan Amendment. After any protests are reviewed, a final decision in a Decision Record will be made in late June 2004. I want to thank you for your continued interest and participation in the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert Routes of Travel Designation project.

Sincerely,

Linda Hansen
District Manager

Enclosures

Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Proposed Route Designation in the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert

An Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan 1980 and
Environmental Assessment

Prepared by
Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
California Desert District Office

May 2004

Linda Hansen
District Manager, California Desert

Mike Pool
State Director, California

Cover Sheet

Proposed Route Designation in the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert

An Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan 1980 and
Environmental Assessment

Lead Agency:

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
California Desert District

Project Location:

(portions of) eastern San Bernardino and Inyo Counties,
and a small portion of Mono County, California

For Further Information Contact:

Harold Johnson, Project Lead
Bureau of Land Management
California Desert, Barstow Field Office
2601 Barstow Road
Barstow, CA 92311

Abstract:

The Proposed Plan would amend the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) 1980 California Desert Conservation Area Plan to incorporate a network of motorized vehicle access routes for the area identified as the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert. The planning area is 2.7 million acres, covering portions of BLM field offices in Needles, Barstow, and Ridgecrest. This document was produced through a coordinated process involving numerous local, state, and federal agencies and special interest groups.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1980, the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (CDCA Plan) was adopted for the 25 million-acre California Desert Conservation Area. Since 1980, BLM has taken a number of steps to designate motorized vehicle route networks on public lands in portions of the California Desert. The BLM designated routes of travel for this planning area in 1985 and 1987. More recently, bioregional plans have amended the CDCA Plan, including the record of decision for the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement that designated routes within desert tortoise bioregions (400,000 acres) (NEMO December, 2002). This plan amendment designates routes of travel in the remaining NEMO area (2,700,000 acres of public lands) outside of desert tortoise bioregions. The purpose of this plan amendment is to update the existing route designations to reflect (1) regulatory changes, (2) laws that have changed boundaries of the public access network managed by the Bureau of Land Management and (3) to improve the route network based on resource sensitivities and vehicle access needs in the NEMO Routes planning area. This Proposed Route Designation would amend the CDCA Plan and the Environmental Assessment presented in this report is tiered to information presented in the Proposed North and Eastern Mojave Desert Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (NEMO, July, 2002).

This Proposed Plan Amendment revises and updates designated motorized vehicle routes of travel for the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert (NEMO) planning area. The NEMO Routes planning area covers portions of Mono County, Inyo County and San Bernardino County. A total of 1,527 miles of vehicle routes are designated under Proposed Action Alternative as open for vehicle use in the NEMO planning area. In addition to the 1,527 miles of designated open routes in the Proposed Action Alternative, there are 419 miles of county roads and 184 miles of private roads. Also, there are 749 miles of open routes in desert tortoise bioregions (DWMA) that were previously designated in the NEMO FEIS.

Route designation is a two step process: 1) designate routes of travel as open, closed or limited; and 2) amend the CDCA Plan to incorporate the resulting network of open and limited routes of travel. This Proposed Plan Amendment will designate routes of travel with up to date information and incorporates the resulting network into the CDCA Plan.

The process of developing this Plan Amendment has involved the public, interest groups, local governments, and interagency and intergovernmental consultations. A series of five public scoping meetings were held in May of 2003 to obtain user comments and recommendations regarding possible changes to the existing designated route system. Meetings to provide briefings on the process and obtain input occurred with interest groups and local government representatives during the preparation of this Plan Amendment. Using this information, four alternatives for route network revisions were developed and evaluated and the Proposed Action was determined.

BLM provides motorized vehicle access on public lands for recreational and commercial purposes and to access private property. This Plan Amendment provides for designated vehicle routes of travel to meet these needs in a manner that is compatible with cultural and natural resources. Important historic and prehistoric sites and habitat for sensitive or endangered plant and animal species are present in the area. The type and level of casual motorized vehicle access in this planning area under the Proposed Action Alternative protects sensitive resources, provides for vehicle access and creates an environment that promotes the health and safety of public land users and visitors now and in a sustainable manner for the reasonably foreseeable future.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After complete review of the scoping comments, analysis of the potential impacts identified in the environmental assessment, and coordination and consultation input received from other agencies, I have determined that the environmental effects of the proposed action are not expected to significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following consideration of context and intensity as required by federal environmental regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

Context

Portions of the project area falls within Category III habitat for the federal listed desert tortoise, critical habitat for the Amargosa vole and the Amargosa niterwort and Ash Meadows gumplant; as well as non-critical habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher, the least Bell's vireo, the California Inyo towhee, and the spring-loving centauray. The discussion of significance criteria that follows applies to the intended action and is within the context of local importance. The environmental assessment and proposed plan amendment details the effects of the project and are incorporated by reference into this FONSI. None of the effects identified including direct, indirect and cumulative effects are considered to be significant, based on the lack of routes in much of the habitat, on the route closures proposed, and on consistency with the overall Desert Tortoise Recovery Strategy adopted in NEMO (2002).

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27.

1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.

Due to the design features of the proposed plan amendment, the predictive effects would include increased habitat and habitat protection for the Amargosa niterwort, the southwestern willow flycatcher, and the least Bell's vireo compared to the current conditions. Increased protection for cultural and archeological resources is predicted as well. The Proposed Action should reduce the air emissions compared to the current conditions. The rehabilitation of routes that are designated as closed will result in less air emissions due to wind erosion, more habitat and species protection and better conservation of cultural resources. Some adverse impacts are predicted. Nevertheless, of the alternatives considered, the Proposed Action provides the best balance between the recreational use and conservation of natural resources and provides substantially fewer and less intense impacts compared to the current conditions. Details concerning the effects of the Proposed Action are included in the environmental assessment and proposed plan amendment.

2) The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety

Public health and safety were identified as an issue. The proposed plan amendment is comparable to other route designation projects that have occurred within the California Desert District. Off highway vehicle use can be a high-risk recreational activity. Some risk is a part of this activity. Locations of past accidents and other safety factors were considered in developing the alternatives and choosing the Proposed Action. BLM law enforcement and recreation staff reviewed the route network for each alternative in the NEMO project. Staff did identify one specific route as having a significant accident rate or safety concern for the public, and it was closed. BLM lands and minerals staff identified a few generally one-way facility ingress and egress routes that also were safety concerns and these were designated limited.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are unique cultural and archeological sites within the project area. Nevertheless, the effects of the Proposed Action on these resources are generally positive. The Proposed Action provides for increased conservation of these areas, while allowing recreational use of the project area. There are ecologically critical areas, eligible wild and scenic rivers, wilderness study areas, wetlands and riparian areas within the project area. The Proposed Action will not significantly affect these resources. Many of these sensitive resource values already have been included within Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and had at least partial route closure to protect the sensitive resources identified within their boundaries. The Proposed Action continues and, where appropriate, increases conservation of these areas. There are no park lands, prime farm lands, and floodplains within the NEMO Routes planning area.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the proposed plan amendment on the quality of the human environment were addressed in the environmental assessment. Although there are effects that are clearly identified, strategies have also been built into the Proposed Action to greatly offset these effects. In addition, the effects for the Proposed Action are fewer and have lower intensity than the current conditions, including those for air quality, cultural and paleontological resources, and sensitive species.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The proposed plan amendment is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience developing similar plans for routes of travel in similar areas and has found effects to be reasonably predictable. The environmental effects to the human environment were analyzed in the environmental assessment and proposed plan amendment. There are no predicted effects on the human environment, which are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed plan amendment does not set a precedent for future actions that may have significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed plan amendment establishes a designated route system needed by the BLM for resource management within the northeastern portion of the California Desert Conservation Area and maintains the existing system of primary and secondary routes, as modified herein, for the motor-vehicle using public. Any future projects that require access across public lands will be evaluated through the National Environmental Policy Act process, consistent with current laws and regulations.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The proposed plan amendment was evaluated in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. These cumulative effects are identified in the environmental assessment and the NEMO EIS from

which this EA tiers. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted from this proposed plan amendment, based on the modest level of overall access change that would occur as a result of the designations herein.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect the districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

The proposed plan amendment will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the neither National Register of Historic Places, nor will the proposed plan amendment cause loss or destruction of known significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The cultural resource survey strategy and subsequent conservation strategies that are identified in the proposed plan amendment will help in the identification and conservation of currently undocumented cultural and paleontological resources on public lands.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

BLM consulted with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in regards to the desert tortoise, the southwestern willow flycatcher, and the least Bell's vireo. The Proposed Action was specifically designed to conserve these species by limiting access in nesting areas, the rehabilitation of impacted areas, clear signing of routes and public education and information. In critical habitat of listed species, few or no routes currently exist and all routes that were not already designated closed, would be closed under the Proposed Action.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed plan amendment does not violate any known federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The environmental assessment and supporting project record contain discussions pertaining to the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice). State, local, and tribal interests were consulted during the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, applicable land management plans, policies and programs have been reviewed for consistency.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
ACHP	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
ADC	Animal Damage Control
AIRFA	American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978
AML	Appropriate Management Level
AMP	Allotment Management Plan
AMS	Analysis of the Management Situation
APE	Area of Potential Effect
AQCR	Air Quality Control Regions
AQS	Air Quality Standard
ARMP	Approved Resource Management Plan
ATB	All Terrain Bicycle
ATV	All Terrain Vehicle
AUM	Animal Unit Month
BCB	Back Country Byway
BMP	Best Management Practices
BO	Biological Opinion
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BP	Before Present (Present is equated as 1950)
B to V	Barstow to Las Vegas Racecourse
CA.	California
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CDCA	California Desert Conservation Area
CDFG	California Department of Fish and Game
CDPA	California Desert Protection Act of 1994
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CESA	California Endangered Species Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CPhi	California Points of Historic Interest
CHL	California Historic Landmarks
CHU	Critical Habitat Unit
CNDDb/NNDDb	California/Nevada Natural Diversity Database
CNPS	California Native Plant Society
CRBSP	Colorado River Basin Salinity Project
CRC	Colorado River Commission
CRMP	Coordinated Resource Management and Planning
DAG	Desert Access Guide
DCA	Desert Conservation Area
DCP	Desert Conservation Plan
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
DLE	Desert Land Entry
DOD	Department of Defense

DOE	Department of Energy
DOI	Department of the Interior
DPC	Desired Plant Community
DRMP	Draft Resource Management Plan
DRP	Draft Resource Plan
DT	Desert Tortoise
DTRP	Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan, June 1994
DWMA	Desert Wildlife Management Area
DVNP	Death Valley National Park
EA	Environmental Assessment
ECC	Erosion Condition Class
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act of 1973
ESL	Endangered Species List
ESR	Erosion Susceptibility Rating
ERMA	Extensive Recreation Management Area
FCR	Field Contact Representative
FDWA	Federal Drinking Water Standards
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FEMA	Fire Fuels Management Area
FESA	Federal Endangered Species Act
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act
FMIR	Fort Mojave Indian Reservation
FP	Flood Plain
FRP	Fire Rehabilitation Plan
FSA	Fire Suppression Area
FUA	Fire Use Area
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	General Accounting Office
GEM	Geology, Energy, Minerals (Survey)
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GMP	General Management Plan
HAZMAT	Hazardous Material
HCP	Habitat Conservation Plan
HMA	Habitat/Herd Management Area
HMAP	Herd Management Area Plan
HMP	Habitat Management Plan
I-XX	Interstate
IBLA	Internal Board of Land Appeals
ICMP	Interim Critical Management Policy
IMP	Interim Management Policy
IPP	Intermountain Power Project
ISA	Instant Study Area
LADWP	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

LDA	Lands Disposal Areas
LURS	Land Use Requirements Study
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MCL	Mid-Carapace Length
MDA	Mineral Disposal Areas
MFP	Management Framework Plan
Mg/l	Milligrams per liter
MMS	Mineral Management Service
MNP	Mojave National Preserve
MNSAMP	Mojave National Scenic Area Management Plan
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOG	Management Oversight Group
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSA	Management Situation Analysis
MUC	Multiple Use Classification
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NBS	National Biological Service
NECO	Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Planning Effort
NEMO	Northern and Eastern Mojave Planning Effort
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NERC	National Ecology Research Center
NHA	Natural Hazard Area
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
NOI	Notice of Intent
NPS	National Park Service
NRCS	National Resources Conservation Service (Previously SCS)
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NRI	National Rivers Inventory
NRFTF	National Range Studies Task Force
NV	Nevada
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
OHV	Off-Highway Vehicle
ONA	Outstanding Natural Areas
PFC	Proper Functioning Condition
PNC	Potential Natural Community
PRP	Proposed Resource Plan
PRMP/FEIS	Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement
PL	Public Law
RAMP	Recreation Activity/Area Management Plan
RDRA	Road Designation Restriction Areas
R&PP	Recreation and Public Purpose (Act)
RFDS	Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario
RFFA	Reasonably Foreseeable Future Action
RL	Recreation Lands
RMA	Recreation Management Area
RMP	Resource Management Plan

RNA	Resource Natural Area
RPP	Recreation and Public Purpose Act
RPS	Rangeland Program Summary
ROD	Record of Decision
ROS	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
ROW	Right-of-Way
RRA	Road Designation Restriction Areas
RU	Recovery Units
RZ	Riparian Zone
SCS	Soils Conservation Service (Name Changed to NRCA)
SA	Special Areas
S&G	Standards and Guidelines
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SIP	State Implementation Plan (Air Quality)
SLC	State Lands Commission
SMA	Special Management Area
SMARA	Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1976
SR	State Route (Highway)
SRMA	Special Recreation Management Area
SSP	Special Status Plant
SSS	Special Status Species
T&E	Threatened and Endangered (Species)
TAS	Total Adjusted Sign
TCP	Traditional Cultural Property
TDS	Total Dissolved Solids
TLA	Traditional Lifeway Area
TMA	Tortoise Management Area
UPA	Unusual Plant Assemblages
URTD	Upper Respiratory Tract Disease
USMC	United States Marine Corps
US	United States
USC	United States Code
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDI	United States Department of the Interior
USGS	United States Geological Survey
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VRM	Visual Resource Management
WA	Wilderness Area
WAPA	Western Area Power Administration
WH&B	Wild Horse and Burros
WHBA	Wild Horse and Burro Act
WMP	Watershed Management Plan
WSA	Wilderness Study Area
WSR	Wild and Scenic River